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AUTHOR Hawthorne, Elizabeth M.; Smith, Albert B.
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ABSTRACT

This report presents findings of a 1991 survey of chief academic officers (CAO's) of community, technical, and junior colleges to measure the level of commitment to instructional effectiveness and illuminate those areas which deserve attention. The study replicated a 1987 survey of CAO's at four-year institutions and utilized the five areas of questions of the original survey instrument: employment policies and practices, campus environment and culture, strategic administrative actions, instructional enhancement efforts, and instructional development activities. Questions were also added concerning respondents' professional experience and demographics, as well as on their institutions' budgeted costs of faculty development and the promotion of teaching activities. The results of the survey, which yielded a 57% response rate (n=712), included the following: (1) the highest level of commitment for community colleges was in the area of campus culture; (2) employment practices and policies were rated moderately high; (3) strategic administrative actions, such as administrative public pronouncements in favor of excellence in teaching were rated well below the support of effective teaching through a conducive campus climate and employment practices; (4) in terms of institutional development, the highest ratings were given in the area of support mechanisms for teaching and learning; and (5) items showing the lowest perceived commitment by CAO's included an organized unit to promote teaching effectiveness, research and seminars designed to improve instruction, and administrator reinforcement of research as a means to improve instruction. Recommendations and a list of references are included. (MAB)

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IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES: GUIDELINES FOR ACADEMIC LEADERS

by

Elizabeth M. Hawthorne
Associate Professor and Coordinator
Program in Higher Education
The University of Toledo
Toledo, Ohio

and

Albert B. Smith
Professor and Coordinator
Higher Education Program
Texas Tech University
Lubbock, Texas

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IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES: GUIDELINES FOR ACADEMIC LEADERS

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The momentum to place a greater emphasis on college teaching has been on the upswing for the last ten years. There has been a dramatic increase of reports, conferences, and publications on this topic such as *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education* (1984). Recommendations emanating from these reports concern ways to improve college teaching by altering how we prepare college instructors, provide professional development of current faculty, adjust the reward system, and identify special obligations college teachers should meet.

Other reports have been issued on improving instruction in community colleges that stress the need for administrators and faculty to pay more attention to the quality of teaching in their institutions. These echo Walter Crosby Eells, who, over fifty years ago in a burst of optimism as yet unrealized, prophesied that the junior college would be the central focus for excellence in collegiate teaching (1931). An example of the contemporary calls for action is the report *Building Communities: A Vision For A New Century* (1988), issued by the Commission on the Future of Community Colleges of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges. They made numerous recommendations on how teaching and learning could be improved in our nation's two-year institutions. The Commission stated that

> The community college should be the nation's premier teaching institution. Quality instruction should be the hallmark of the movement. Community colleges, above all others, should expect the highest performance in each class and be creative and consistent in the evaluation of the results (p. 28).

Similarly, in his book *Dateline 2000: A New Higher Education Agenda* (1990), Parnell makes numerous predictions for the way community colleges should operate in the future, especially

> ...increasing attention will be given to staff development on the college campus....ways to help people grow and develop new competencies to match the fastmoving changes in society (p. 31).

College teaching, then, has become a centerpiece of the agenda, or at least the rhetoric, for both two-year and four-year colleges. The decade of the nineties gives us an important opportunity to make college teaching a foremost priority in community colleges. To do this there must be a commitment to teaching in our two-year colleges from throughout the institution--trustees, presidents,

administrators, and faculty. Unique leadership in fostering academic values often comes from the chief academic officer.

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In this study, we replicated the 1987 survey of chief academic officers of four year colleges and universities conducted by Les Cochran (1989) in community, technical, and junior colleges. The purpose of the study in both instances was "to collect base-line data on the existing level of commitment to instructional effectiveness and to suggest areas that deserve attention so substantive changes could be made in the instructional patterns of the nation's colleges and universities (Cochran, 1989, 34)." A second aspect of the study was to determine if the level of commitment between two-year and four-year to teaching differed, and if so in what ways (reported elsewhere).

What follows is a report of the findings highlighting an overview of the study examining areas of strong and weak commitment, a discussion on the area of institutional and CAO commitment to instructional development, and areas of low commitment that can guide our thinking about ways to improve teaching and learning in two-year colleges.[1]

METHODOLOGY

The original instrument was organized in five areas: employment policies and practices, campus environment and culture, strategic administrative actions, instructional enhancement efforts, and instructional development activities. We added questions concerning respondents' professional experience and demographics and on their institutions (budgeted costs of faculty development and the promotion of teaching/learning activities). We also included two of Cochran's eight variables[2] regional accreditation and enrollment (from the *1990 Higher Education Program Directory*), since they were the most applicable to two-year colleges (1989, 35).

Colleges identifying themselves as either public or private two-year colleges in the United States which were included in the 1987 American Association of Community and Junior Colleges Directory and in the *1990 Higher Education Program Directory* were included in the study. Surveys were sent in Spring 1991 to the chief academic officers of the 1243 institutions. We followed Cochran's lead and strongly encouraged the Chief Academic Officers to complete the

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1 This paper reports on a segment of the data from the larger study. For additional information, please contact the authors.

2 regional accreditation, enrollment, control or affiliation, highest level of offerings, institutional control, land-grant status, enrollment, undergraduate tuition, required fees

survey instrument themselves rather than to ask an assistant or colleague to do so.

712 usable questionnaires were returned yielding a 57% response rate. The responses rate from the very small institutions was lower than for all other institutions, so that the findings are slightly biased toward larger institutions.

FINDINGS

In this section, we will provide an overall look at the five areas of the study in relation to one another and an examination of the data on instructional development as an example of an area demanding more attention. We will then report the areas of least commitment in the overall study, findings that can be used to guide pathways to action.

Overview

As indicated earlier, the questionnaire focused on five areas in which teaching and learning were the focus of interest among respondents. Each category included five questions. Respondents indicated their level of commitment to instructional effectiveness in each area using a scale of 1 to ten (ten was the highest). In Table 1, we report the responses by institution size.

As can be seen in Table 1, the highest level of commitment for the community colleges was in the area of campus culture (37/50). With respect to the culture issue, we included variables that affected teaching and learning such as faculty ownership of the curriculum, the level of intellectual vitality, administrative stability, faculty confidence in administrative leadership. and a shared feeling of institutional pride.

Table 1

The Perceptions of Chief Academic Officers for the Five Major Categories by Size of Institution

Insti. Size	Employ Policy	Campus Culture	Strat. Action	Enhance Effort	Devel. Activity
<200	28	41	29	26	19
200-499	29	34	25	25	21
500-999	35	36	30	29	26
1000-2499	35	37	31	30	26
2500-4999	35	37	32	33	28
5000-9999	36	37	33	34	31
10000-19999	35	37	33	33	31
20000+	34	38	33	32	33
MEAN	**35***	**37**	**31**	**31**	**28**

*unadjusted (see text)

Employment policies and practices were rated moderately high. Employment practices mentioned were evaluating prospective faculty on their teaching ability, the use of regular student evaluations, including the evaluation of teaching as a significant aspect of the tenure review and promotion processes, and the presence of teaching recognition programs.

Table 2

Perception of Level of Commitment to Instructional Development Activities

		Level of Commitment		
		1-3	Means	8-10
ACTIVITIES	N/A	%	%	%
The campus maintains various colleague support mechanisms (e.g., mentors, chairperson monitoring, etc.) to promote and support effective instruction.		9	6.7	45
Faculty seminars, workshops, and conferences on teaching and learning are conducted on campus.		12	6.6	42
Workshops/seminars on effective instruction are conducted for new full-time faculty members.	8	21	5.5	30
*Seminars/workshops on effective instruction are conducted for new part-time faculty members.	9	29	4.8	22
Effective instruction is promoted by an organized unit or program (e.g., center for teaching and learning).	27	23	4.0	22

However, this rating underrepresents the extent of commitment because two items, (1) "teaching effectiveness is evaluated as a significant/integral aspect of the promotion process," and (2) "teaching effectiveness is evaluated as a significant/integral aspect of the tenure process" did not apply to approximately a quarter of the respondents' institutions in that many community colleges do not have either tenure or promotion opportunities for faculty. When we adjusted the data to eliminate those respondents for whom the issue was not applicable, we found that the mean rating

had risen to 38.7 making this area the most vigorous activity reported (but hardly vigorous).
On the other hand, we found that the lowest level of reported commitment by the community college respondents was in the area of instructional development activity (28/50). The specific kinds of activities that were in the survey are reported in Table 2 and are presented in some detail in a later section.

Well below the support of effective teaching through a conducive campus climate and employment practices were strategic administrative actions (31/50) such as administrative public pronouncements in favor of excellence in teaching, news releases highlighting exemplary teaching practices, use of research to improve teaching effectiveness, institutional data used to improve teaching, and reinforcement on campus by administrators of the importances of effective teaching. Oddly one would expect that such behaviors would be part of a positive campus culture with respect to an issue like teaching and learning; similarly with regard to initiatives for instructional enhancements. These items focused on different ways in which institutions fostered effective teaching including using librarians, released time and financial awards, funds to conferences, faculty development activities, high visibility to curriculum development, and administrative emphasis on the use of research to support good teaching. These data suggest that while community colleges report that they have environments conducive to good teaching and that their employment practices reinforce the idea of good teaching, their practices do not follow the rhetoric and intangibles.

We now turn to a discussion of the area of one particular area, that of instructional development, since this is a critical area in which CAOs can take a leadership role. Instructional development is central to the mission of community colleges throughout the nation and reported levels of commitment were bleak.

We collapsed responses on the scale for each of the five questions to look at high commitment responses (8, 9, 10) and low commitment responses (1, 2, 3). In addition, for our data we show those areas in which respondents indicated that the questions did not apply to their institutions, whenever the "not-applicable" responses exceeded 5%, since each question indicated an area of activity or values that have been hypothesized to contribute to effective teaching.

Instructional Development Activities

The level of commitment a chief academic officer makes to support instructional programs is hard to measure since enhancement efforts take many forms. Still, the five areas of instructional development activity to which the Chief Academic Officers were asked to respond cover a wide range of possible activities. The five items on the questionnaire

addressed the presence of workshops on effective instruction and the like for new full time faculty members, for new part time faculty members, and for continuing full time faculty; the presence of support mechanisms for teaching and learning, e.g., mentors; and the promotion of effective instruction by an organized unit. The mean responses for this section are reported in Table 2.

The greatest extent of commitment to instructional development activities among the two-year college respondents was in the area of support mechanisms for teaching and learning (45 per cent). These mechanisms could be mentors, chairperson monitoring, and so forth. Closely following the presence of support mechanisms is campus-wide seminars and institutes. These could be one day "welcome back to school" professional days or extensive year-long programs.

A high level of commitment to providing institutional support for effective teaching to part time faculty is reported by fewer than a quarter of the respondents as is the presence of an organized unit on campus. Indeed, 27 per cent indicated that this area was not pertinent to their colleges. Furthermore, elsewhere in the survey we specifically asked if the CAOs' campuses had teaching and learning improvement centers. Only 98 respondents indicated affirmatively; since the majority (72 per cent) of the directors of these centers were reported as not having faculty/staff development responsibilities, one might assume that many respondents were reporting about learning resources centers directed towards students rather than faculty and staff development centers. Here it is possible that there is a different interpretation of the terminology by the community college respondents. A center for teaching and learning on a university campus would most likely be a faculty development center whereas on community college campuses it is likely to mean a learning resources center for students. Thus the most frequently reported instructional development activities for the community colleges were support mechanisms and campus-wide seminars; both reported at less than enthusiastic or widespread commitment and either has the potential to be minimal or extensive.

Given that 98 percent of the respondents said that the primary mission of their institution was teaching, this is a dismal state for community college teaching. The CAOs were modestly satisfied with the personal attention given to teaching and learning (mean 6.4/10) and gave a slightly higher rating (mean 6.7/10) of their institution's performance. This could mean that the CAOs are satisfied with less than optimal performance or the limited effort reported nevertheless yields a satisfactory level of teaching at their institutions. Since the focus of this discussion deserves to be on areas in which Chief Academic Officers might turn their attention, we will discuss the areas from the total survey in which the lowest levels of

commitment were reported noting some overlap with the discussion just concluded.

Lowest Perceived Commitment by CAOs

Based on mean responses for each of the 25 variables included in the survey, we selected the items to which respondents showed the least commitment (see Table 3) Attention to these activities should result in dramatic improvements in instruction in two-year colleges if our knowledge and theories about effective teaching are correct. We particularly think that much higher levels of commitment and action are needed on the first two items: (1) research designed to improve instruction, and (2) instructional center on campus. Research on teaching effectiveness should be the niche for community colleges in American postsecondary education, their special contribution to the development and enhancement of postsecondary education in the United States. Research findings can both guide faculty in their instructional endeavors, but also serve to foster faculty development and vitality. Institutional leaders need to commit resources to promote, sustain, and disseminate this kind of research.

Table 3

Items Showing the Lowest Perceived Commitment by Community College Chief Academic Officers

ITEMS	MEAN RATING
Effective instruction is promoted by an organized unit or program (e.g., center for teaching and learning). (N/A = 14%)	4.0
Research designed to improve the quality of instruction is regularly conducted on campus. (N/A = 27%)	4.0
Seminars/workshops on effective instruction and conducted for new part-time faculty members. (N/A = 9%)	4.8
Administrators regularly emphasize the ways research scholarly activity can be used to reinforce or support effective teaching. (N/A = 6%)	5.0

With respect to teaching and learning centers, the data are disappointing at best. With 27 percent of respondents indicating no such unit, and without knowing the extent to which the operating units are effective, we are concerned about mechanisms institutions are using to foster excellence in teaching. We believe that each two-year college should

have organized units or programs at the college and division/department levels that promote effective instruction. Appropriately staffed and equipped centers provide a focus for instructional improvement and substantively reflect strong institutional commitment to the teaching and learning processes. We found that 63 percent of the responding colleges had a specific individual responsible for faculty/staff development on their campuses and that 52 percent of these individuals were full-time in their positions. These individuals, whether full-time or part-time, could be challenged to work toward the establishment of programs for the enhancement of teaching and learning within departments or divisions as well as college-wide or campus based programs.

CONCLUSIONS

The data reveal a profound lack of institutional attention to effective instruction. Apparently institutions have left this responsibility to the initiative, training, and talent of the faculty. While we in no way want to suggest that faculty are not up to the task, there are many institutional conditions that faculty require to be effective. Even the most dedicated and talented faculty members need to have institutional support for their work.

What does this mean? It means that the leadership in an institution organizes the work of the college to allow time for teaching--preparing, implementing, and evaluation both teaching and learning. This can be done in many ways, and the data reported here (and in other reports from this national study) give valuable guidelines on where the community colleges are missing the mark.

CAOs along with trustees, presidents, deans, and department/division chairs must allocate resources to activities that foster and sustain effective teaching, e.g., a teaching and learning center, research activities on teaching and learning, and the provision of educational opportunities for part time (and full time) faculty to learn more about teaching. At the same time, institutional leaders need to lend moral support to the instructional process and the lives of the faculty and students through the celebration of teaching and learning. So many faculty members in community colleges, especially, express discouragement that their administrators do not care as much about teaching and learning as they do about special projects or other interests. If few pay attention specifically to the delivery of education, the faculty will become apathetic, indifferent and alienated. These data clearly show that this is a real issue that administrators have to address and apply their creative talents to what is central to the mission of the two-year colleges in America today.

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